stick, with a pink, cone-like tip. This plant, together with its black roots, is much favoured by the Arabs as a delicacy. More unexpected was the discovery of a solitary orchid, with red and yellow flowers spotted with black, in shape and size resembling a hyacinth. I did not see another specimen during the whole time I was in Arabia.

After the bare, flat desert which surrounded the Fort it was a pleasant relief to glimpse this panorama of small *wadhis*, clumps of feathery acacia and neam trees and the wig-like camel thorn. Here the desert surges like a green and brown sea, until it meets the mountains of the Shamailiyah at the horizon, the peaks of which look deceptively closer than their seventy miles. Herds of camel and gazelle graze peacefully at the scrub, and flocks of bustard settle in the hollows; in a little gulley, between the roots of two large neam trees, I saw a small, honey-coloured fox emerge from his hole. At sunset one can hear the eerie call of the wild dog, whilst nearer to the mountains the grey wolf hunts in packs and creates havoc amongst the Bedouins' flocks of goats and sheep.

Mr. Williamson, a geologist employed by the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, told me that he had shot a leopard in the mountains; but I never saw one myself and believe they are extremely rare in Oman. The commonest marsupial of all, of course, is the cheeky little desert rat, with its bat-like ears and long kangaroo legs.

One evening the Khan Bahadur drove me over to his garden at the Sheikh's Wells. It consists of about an acre of sandy ground with concrete channels for irrigation. A power-pump has been installed, but is not working, and the gardeners obtain water from the wells by means of buckets attached to long ropes. The garden is shaded by palm trees, fig trees, pomegranates, zinnas, cotton trees, limes, acacias and a tall maple species known as ticoma. The soil has been well manured and is fertile, producing excellent marrows, onions, brinjals (ladies' fingers), pumpkins, radishes and gherkins. Adjoining this garden some of the villagers have their own smallholding. We used to supply them with vegetable seeds, and, in return for their labour in growing the plants, we offered to buy the produce at slightly less than the market price. Needless to say, nothing ever came up! Each garden is about an acre in extent, and is divided into about twenty sections, each of which belongs to a smallholder; there is a well to every four sections.

Although I paid frequent visits to Captain Bird's official residence